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SCULPTURE BY GIOVANNI PISANO

ARTS COUNCIL

SCULPTURE BY

Giovanni Pisano

FIGURES FROM THE BAPTISTERY AT PISA

AN EXHIBITION
OF PHOTOGRAPHS
BY *SOFAR*

THE ARTS COUNCIL
OF GREAT BRITAIN

Foreword

IN 1946, the famous sculptures from the façade of the Baptistery at Pisa were taken down and an opportunity was provided for them to be cleaned, studied and photographed. They were included in the great exhibition of Pisan Sculpture of the fourteenth century held at the Museo San Matteo at Pisa in 1946-7, and it is some of the photographs especially taken by the Società Fotografie Artistiche (SOFAR) on that occasion—the half-length figures of Evangelists and Prophets from the principal tier of niches round the Baptistery, the smaller full-length figures of Saints, Warriors and Virtues from the pinnacles above the niches, as well as the Madonna and Child from above the door of the Cathedral and a unique ivory from a tabernacle within the Cathedral—which are now exhibited for the first time in this country. Exhibitions of photographs, unless they illustrate the art of photography itself, tend to have the lifeless air of all reproductions, but it will surely be agreed that these remarkable prints from negatives taken by SOFAR have a unique quality far removed from that of the exaggerated tonal contrasts that have become the stock-in-trade of so many contemporary photographers. The pale-pervasive silver-grey of these prints not only conveys the nature of the material but gives full value to the essential quality of the sculpture in a remarkable way. The Arts Council is indeed grateful to SOFAR for presenting this set of prints and in particular to Count Vinci and Signor Bondi for their valuable co-operation, and to Signori Balocchi and Pozzo-Bellini for their technical skill.

Above all thanks are due to Mr Michael Ayrton to whose initial enthusiasm the arrangement of the exhibition is due. Mr Ayrton has selected the prints from the very large number made by SOFAR and has written a valuable appreciation of Giovanni Pisano which precedes his catalogue.

PHILIP JAMES

Giovanni Pisano

THE CITY-STATE OF PISA produced between the early thirteenth and the mid-fourteenth centuries a level of achievement in the art of sculpture comparable to any in the history of Christian Art. She was ideally suited to do so. As one of the four great medieval maritime republics of Italy, she had been the recipient of the trade and influence of the whole known world, in rapid and creative contact with innovation from abroad, particularly in architecture, and yet wealthy enough in lands to survive as an independent state even after her disastrous defeat by Genoa in 1284, which deprived her of her maritime supremacy at a blow, and began her decline. But perhaps the most immediate factor in advancing the Pisan genius for sculpture was the ready availability of workable stone, for Pisa was the sea-port for Carrara, the main source of Italian marbles, and was also possessed of local quarries.

Among the great sculptors of the Pisan school founded by Nicola Pisano and enriched by Arnolfo di Cambio, Lapo, Tino da Camaino, Andrea and Nino Pisano—to cite only the most celebrated—the supreme genius of Giovanni, son of Nicola Pisano, stands alone, and it is a single aspect of his work which this exhibition seeks to show. The photographs principally illustrate the figures carved to decorate the second tier of the façade of the Baptistery of Pisa, newly completed in 1278. The statues were made in collaboration with Nicola, but the passionate, tender and majestic art of Giovanni is surely the prime force and the controlling element. They are far removed in feeling from the noble but close imitation of classical antiquity which marks Nicola's pulpit in the same building. In date, the sculptures of the façade were executed about 1284, nineteen years later than Nicola's pulpit at Pisa, sixteen years later than his pulpit for Siena Cathedral, and shortly after the completion of the famous fountain at Perugia. Nicola Pisano died in 1284, the fatal year of the battle of Meloria and the turning-point in the fortunes of Pisa. The extent of his collaboration with his son and other pupils, and indeed the many special problems of attribution, are too complicated to be discussed here. Giovanni Pisano, who was born between 1245 and 1250, must have worked with his father from boyhood, but with the exception of the Baptistery

figures, his greatest works were completed after his father's death. Of these, the decorations of the façade of Siena Cathedral were finished in 1299, the pulpit of St Andrea at Pistoia in 1301, the pulpit of Pisa Cathedral in 1310, the monument to Marguerite of Luxembourg at Genoa (which survives only in fragments) in 1312, and the *Madonna della Cintola*, his last work, in 1317, the year before his death.

In 1946 the Museo San Matteo at Pisa showed Pisan sculpture for the first time in a sufficiently comprehensive exhibition to impel a complete revaluation of the importance of the school. The opportunity to study for the first and perhaps the last time a large part of the whole achievement of the Pisani established their sculpture among historians as one of the great creative forces in European art.

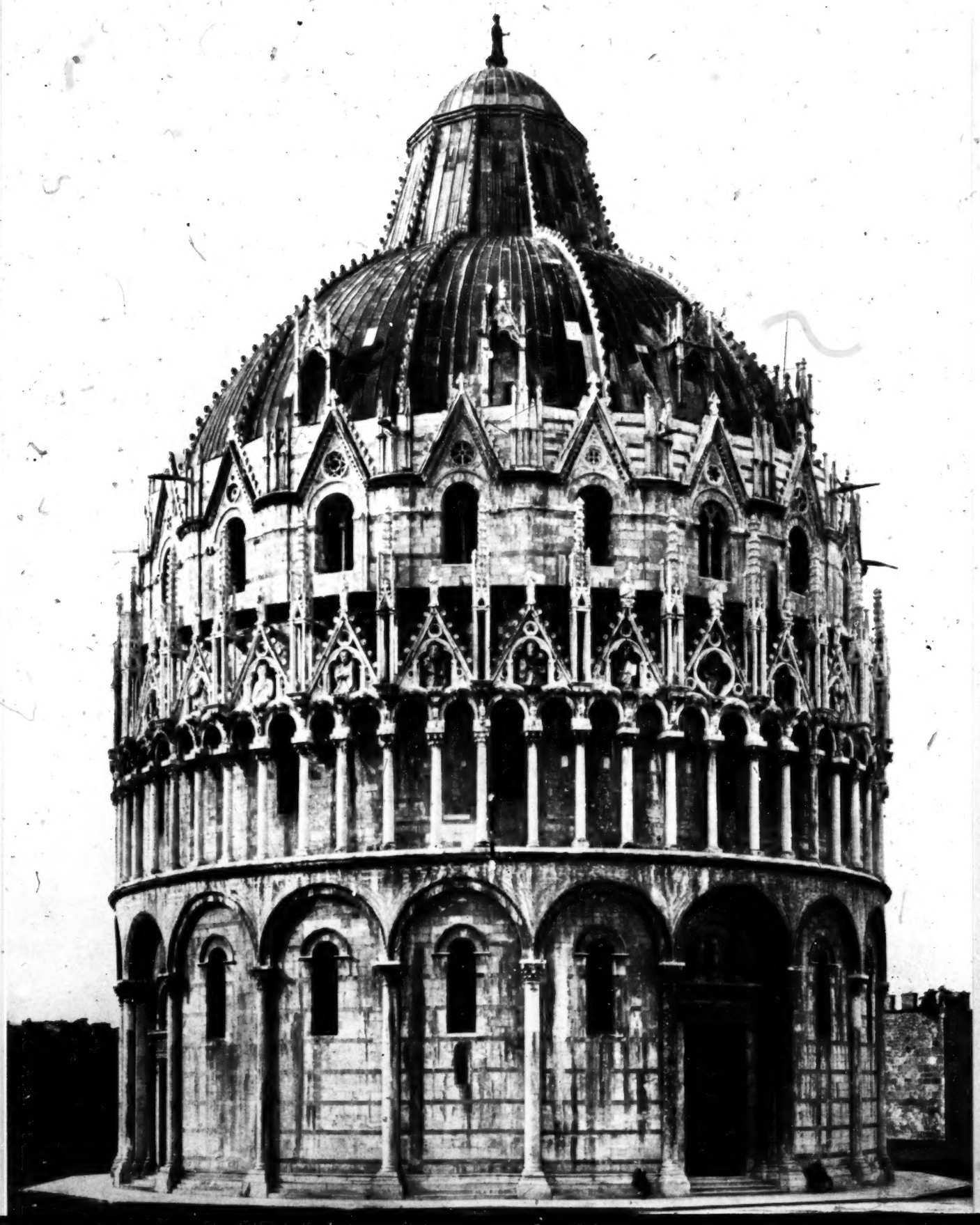
That this exhibition is a mere fraction of the fifteen hundred photographs taken by SOFAR of the three hundred pieces shown at the Museo San Matteo during 1946 and 1947, is self-evident. Even the great Pisan exhibition itself contained only a part of the existing work of the Pisan school, for much of the sculpture could not be removed from sites scattered throughout the length of Italy. That the selection displays only one facet of Giovanni Pisano's genius; that of figures in the round or in very high relief, and neglects his work as a carver in low relief and as an architect, is my personal choice, since the exhibition space was limited and I am of the opinion that it is in these monumental figures, stripped to the bone as they are by seven centuries of weathering, that Giovanni Pisano displays the most powerful elements of his genius for plastic expression in what must surely be among the greatest of psychological portraits in stone since classical times. These studies, the Evangelists, the great Madonna, and perhaps most conspicuously the David, seems to me to justify a claim for Giovanni as the first modern sculptor to no less an extent than such a claim is made for Giotto as the first modern painter.

It is perhaps strange that for a thousand to whom the name of Giotto is a household word, not a hundred could be found who would claim to be really familiar with the work of Giovanni, his older contemporary and his collaborator in 1305 upon the decoration of the Arena Chapel at Padua. For perhaps thirty books on Donatello, there are three on Giovanni Pisano, and yet the latter can hardly have been a less influential historical figure. Of his deeper universality these photographs, fine though they are, can scarcely speak fairly; yet even they must surely suffice to show him as a very great master. He stands as the supreme Gothic sculptor of Italy upon the thres-

overleaf

THE BAPTISTERY AT PISA

Photograph: Brogi



hold of the modern world, combining in his art elements of the Byzantine and the Romanesque and inheriting from his father that deep interest in the newly unearthed antique which was to form so vital a part of Renaissance art and thought, yet reacting even against this paternal classicism in his urgent humanity and sense of divine drama.

In relation to Northern Gothic, Pisan sculpture may seem to play only a part in the final flowering of the medieval vision, but as a progenitor of the Renaissance its importance is profound. In the direction in which Giovanni Pisano took it, sculpture moved towards a concept of man which was to be the concern of Donatello, of Masaccio and eventually of Michelangelo.

MICHAEL AYRTON

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Catalogue

The measurements given refer to the height, width and depth respectively of the original figures.

THE SCULPTURES SHOWN in nos. **1-15** are all of figures from the principal tier of niches surrounding the Baptistery extending right and left from the central niche of the Madonna over the main door. All are half-length figures and all are in the local marble called San Giuliano. The statues were removed from the façade of the Baptistery in 1946 and have now been placed inside that building after being exhibited in 1946-47 at the Museo San Matteo. These are immeasurably the best of the many big statues of the same tier which surround the building.

1 Madonna and Child
High relief in marble. $74\frac{7}{8} \times 40\frac{5}{8} \times 19\frac{3}{4}$ in.

2 Madonna and Child *detail of the Child*

3 Madonna and Child *two details of the Madonna*

4 St Matthew the Evangelist *detail of head*
High relief in marble. $67\frac{3}{4} \times 44\frac{1}{2} \times 18\frac{1}{2}$ in.

5 St Mark the Evangelist
High relief in marble. $67\frac{3}{8} \times 27\frac{5}{8} \times 17\frac{3}{4}$ in.

6 St Luke the Evangelist
High relief in marble. $70\frac{7}{8} \times 44\frac{1}{2} \times 22\frac{7}{8}$ in.

7 St Luke *detail of head*

8 St John the Evangelist
High relief in marble. $67\frac{3}{4} \times 41\frac{1}{4} \times 59\frac{1}{8}$ in.

9 St John *detail of head*

10 Moses
High relief in marble. $72\frac{1}{8} \times 41\frac{1}{4} \times 17\frac{3}{4}$ in.

11 Moses *detail of head*

12 David
High relief in marble. $30 \times 34\frac{5}{8} \times 19\frac{3}{4}$ in.

13 David *detail of head*

14 Prophet
High relief in marble. $65\frac{3}{4} \times 31\frac{1}{8} \times 17\frac{3}{4}$ in.

15 Prophet *detail of head*

Nos. **16-24** are full-length figures of Saints, Warriors and Virtues also from the façade of the Baptistery. They surmounted the pinnacles above the niches in which the larger figures of the Evangelists and Prophets stood. They are now in the Museo San Matteo at Pisa.

16 Female Allegorical Figure *three views*
Full-length, marble in the round.
$60\frac{1}{4} \times 23\frac{5}{8} \times 17\frac{3}{4}$ in.

17 Allegorical Figure *three views*
Headless full-length marble in the round.
$72\frac{7}{8} \times 15\frac{3}{4} \times 11\frac{7}{8}$ in.

18 St John the Baptist *detail of head*
Bust in high relief. $34\frac{1}{4} \times 21\frac{5}{8} \times 10\frac{5}{8}$ in.

19 Christ in the Act of Blessing
Bust in marble. $35\frac{1}{8} \times 24\frac{7}{8} \times 13$ in.

20 Warrior *three views*
Full-length marble in the round.
$54\frac{3}{8} \times 16\frac{5}{8} \times 14\frac{5}{8}$ in.

21 Saint with Reliquary *two detail views*
Headless full-length marble in the round.
$47\frac{1}{4} \times 13\frac{3}{4} \times 10\frac{5}{8}$ in.

22 Female Saint *two views*
Full-length marble in the round.
$60\frac{3}{8} \times 16\frac{1}{8} \times 14\frac{5}{8}$ in.

23 Female Saint *detail of head*

24 Female Saint *seen from the left*

No. **25** was originally executed to stand above the St Ranieri Door of Pisa Cathedral. It is now in the Cathedral Museum.

25 Madonna and Child *two views*
Half-length marble in the round. $51\frac{1}{4} \times 29\frac{1}{2}$ in.

26 Madonna and Child *detail of head of the Madonna*

27 Madonna and Child *detail of head of the Child*

No. **28** reproduces the only surviving example of Giovanni Pisano's work in ivory. It was noted in a Cathedral inventory of 1595 as forming part of a tabernacle in which the Madonna was flanked by two angels. The Tabernacle, angels and the sceptre carried in the Madonna's right hand are slot. Now in the Cathedral Museum at Pisa. This ivory is of exceptional interest in view of the vexed question of French Gothic influence on Giovanni Pisano. It is presumed that French ivories and portable tabernacles were imported into Italy during the thirteenth century in some quantity, and their influence has been described as acting even upon Giovanni's major works in stone. It has not however been established in which direction this influence moved and whether the ivories inspired the Baptistery figures or not.

28 Madonna and Child *three views*
Full-length carved ivory in the round. 20⅞ in. high

Shenval Press, London and Hertford